

Social life and customs



Long Ago Duxbury



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Where was the dwelling by the roadside that housed the public library in Duxbury around 1815? The author of *Duxbury Fifty Years Ago* says the books were contained in "a kind of portable closet of the size of a common wardrobe."

He recalls some of the books: *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, by Mrs. Radcliffe (remember her Gothic romances?) and *Ambrosio of the Monk*, by M.G. Lewis. For escape fantasy in lieu of comic strips such books "kept the boys who read them awake o' nights — their heads under bed-clothes." Other books were *Thaddeus of Warsaw* and *The Scottish Chiefs* by Jane Porter. These were "high-flown sentimental romances of a kind that has gone out of fashion now." There were also books of adventure and travel in "Mayor's collection." And there were true stories told by shipmasters on a winter's evening when the wind whistled down the chimney. Here is a description of the scene:

"I remember winter evenings in the house of one of these masters: the huge pile of wood in the great fireplace crackled and roared, flame rushing through every crevice of it. On one side of this fireplace sat the master and smoked his clay pipe. At his right hand, extending in a half-circle to the other side sat his workmen; — of apples, nuts and cider there was abundance. Boys, a couple of them, who called the old man grandpa, had their choice of the apples, and listened with great interest to the talk, which was free, and to the jokes which were many."

And thus, one may imagine, a desire to grow up to be a skipper was kindled in the lads who listened, just as modern youngsters dream of becoming another Hop-Along Cassidy or Lone Ranger.